

Joseph Eckler
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To members of the committee,

My name is Joseph Eckler, I am legally blind and have been helped by BESB since the age of 5. I am against the Appropriates House Bill #6380 which would split BESB. Currently I attend Western Connecticut State University with support from my Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and Orientation & Mobility instructor from BESB.

In my junior year at high school I began to worry because I did not feel prepared for the transition to college. My vocational rehabilitation counselor from BESB, whom I have known since I was 16 and my teacher of the visually impaired, advocated for me and helped me figure out plans for after high school. These individuals knew me and my strengths and challenges because they had been on my team. We worked together to find a college transition program at Mitchell college that fit my needs. I believe that if I had to change agencies and staff at this time I would not have had my needs met. During this college transition year my BESB vocational rehabilitation counselor checked in with me and the program directors to be sure my vision impairment needs were being addressed. I gained many skills at this program, ones that I need to be successful at college, most importantly the skill to advocate for my needs.

When considering the proposed split of BESB, and the fact that a new agency would have taken over my case at the high school/post secondary school time, I feel that it would have made this transition much more difficult and stressful. I don't believe that the services will be the same if BESB is split. BESB, as it exists now, is a valuable resource for me. It has provided many much needed training programs at its agency and around the state that I have benefitted from. If it is split, it will undoubtedly become weaker and may no longer be in the position to be the supportive program it has been for most of my life.

Thank you for your consideration,
Joseph Eckler